

Message Text

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SUBJECT: REASSESSMENT OF KREMLIN PERCEPTION OF ITS
STAKE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FOLLOWING IS CONDENSED VERSION OF INR ANALYSIS OF SOVIET
MOTIVATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE EAST-CONFLICT,
WHICH WAS SUBMITTED TO SECRETARY ON NOVEMBER 2.

BEGIN SUMMARY - THE CENTRAL THESIS OF THIS ANALYSIS IS
THAT THE CHIEF MOTIVATION FOR THE KREMLIN IN ITS MIDDLE
EAST BEHAVIOR IS NO LONGER THE MERE EFFORT TO MAINTAIN
ITS INFLUENCE AND PHYSICAL PRESENCE THERE, IMPORTANT
THOUGH THAT REMAINS. RATHER, THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP
BELIEVES THAT THE CRISIS WILL BE A KEY TEST OF THE
CREDIBILITY OF ITS WORLDWIDE IMAGE AS A SUPERPOWER EQUAL
TO THE US. WHEN THE CRISIS IS OVER, MOSCOW WILL WANT IT

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EVIDENT TO ALL THAT THE USSR IS AN EFFECTIVE PROTECTOR OF

THE INTERESTS OF ITS CLIENTS, AND THAT THE USSR IS ABLE TO MAINTAIN A STRONG POSITION, NOT SERIOUSLY CHALLENGED BY THE US, AS A SHAPER OF MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS. SOVIET LEADERS DO NOT PERCEIVE ANY CONFLICT BETWEEN DETENTE AND THE VIGOROUS PURSUIT OF SOVIET INTERESTS, AND SOVIET CONDUCT DOES NOT INDICATE ANY LESSENERED INTEREST IN DETENTE RELATIONSHIPS. INDEED, WITH ITS SUPERPOWER STATUS REINFORCED, THE KREMLIN MAY FEEL THAT ITS HAND IN DETENTE-RELATED NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED. BREZHNEV'S SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF CRISIS SHOULD IMPROVE HIS PERSONAL STANDING IN THE POLITBURO, AND BLUNT CRITICISM IN HIGH PARTY CIRCLES THAT HIS DETENTE POLICY HAS UNDULY SUBJECTED SOVIET INTERESTS TO EXTERNAL PRESSURES. END SUMMARY.

1. THE STANDARD JUDGMENT OF THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY, INCLUDING INR, IN RECENT YEARS ABOUT THE SOVIET STAKE IN THE MIDDLE EAST HAS RATED MOSCOW'S INTEREST AS MAJOR BUT NOT VITAL. THE DEVELOPMENTS OF OCTOBER 1973 INDICATE THAT WE HAVE PROBABLY UNDERPLAYED THE IMPORTANCE TO THE KREMLIN OF BEING ABLE TO EXERCISE EXCEPTIONAL INFLUENCE OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AREA. WHILE CONCENTRATING OUR ATTENTION ON THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A PHYSICAL SOVIET PRESENCE IN, OR CLOSE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP TO, ONE OR ANOTHER COUNTRY IN HE REGION, WE HAVE PAID TOO LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE CRITICALITY OF EVENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AS A WHOLE TO MOSCOW'S EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE ITS IMAGE AS A SUPERPOWER. THIS, IN TURN, HAS LED US TO SOME UNDERESTIMATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE USSR WOULD NOW INVOLVE ITSELF TO PRESERVE ITS STAKE.

2. TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF SOVIET INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST - THE USUAL ANALYSIS, FOCUSING ON INITIAL MOVES BY THE USSR INTO THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE 1950'S AS A MEANS OF LEAP FROGGING WESTERN ENCIRCLEMENT OF THE SOVIET UNION, HAS TENDED TO EMPHASIZE THE OPPORTUNISTIC NATURE OF SOVIET ACTIONS IN THE AREA. THUS, WHEN THE USSR HAS BEEN SEEN TO SHIFT INTEREST FROM ONE ARAB STATE TO ANOTHER, OR FROM ONE DIPLOMATIC LINE TO ANOTHER, OR FROM ONE POLITICAL TACTIC TO ANOTHER IN REGARD TO PEACE

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PROBLEMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AMERICAN OFFICIALS HAVE TAKEN THESE MOVES AS EVIDENCE THAT THE CHIEF SOVIET THRUST IS STILL TO UNDERCUT THE WEST AND TO INSURE THAT THE USSR IS NOT PUSHED OUT OF A SOLID FOOTHOLD IN THE REGION.

3. TO BE SURE, THE WASHINGTON VIEW HAS ALWAYS NOTED THAT THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE (E.G., MEDITERRANEAN

SQUADRON AND FORCES IN EGYPT FROM 1970 TO JULY 1972) HAS, TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE, BEEN MOTIVATED BY MOSCOW'S OWN STRATEGIC MILITARY CONCERNS, IN WHICH THE US 6TH FLEET AND OTHER NATO MILITARY ASSETS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN LOOMED LARGE. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN US RECOGNITION OF THE SOVIET IDEOLOGICAL IMPULSE TO PROMOTE LEFTIST ORIENTATIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD AND TO IMPROVE THE SOVIET IMAGE WITH NONALIGNED COUNTRIES GENERALLY THROUGH MOSCOW'S PRO-ARAB STANCE. THESE LATTER FACTORS, HOWEVER, HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CONSIDERED SUBORDINATE TO THE USSR'S ANTI-EASTERN MOTIF, WHICH INDUCED MOSCOW TO SEEK STRONG POLITICAL BASES IN THE REGION, FROM WHICH TO WAGE ITS RIVALRY WITH NATO NATIONS.

4. THERE IS NO REASON NOW TO DENY THE VALIDITY OF ALL OF THE FOREGOING TRADITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS, BUT THEY NO LONGER SEEM WHOLLY ADEQUATE TO EXPLAIN SOVIET BEHAVIOR DURING THE CURRENT CRISIS. BASING OUR JUDGMENT ON AVAILABLE INFORMATION, WE ARE FORCED TO CONCLUDE THAT THERE HAS BEEN A QUALITATIVE CHANGE IN THE IMPORTANCE WHICH MOSCOW NOW ASSIGNS TO THE OUTCOME OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

5. NEW ELEMENT IN THE SOVIET STAKE - SPECIFICALLY, THE KREMLIN APPEARS TO VIEW ITS KEY ROLE--AND WORLDWIDE ACCEPTANCE OF THIS ROLE--IN AFFECTING THE COURSE OF MIDDLE EASTERN EVENTS AS AN END IN ITSELF, WHICH TRANSCENDS THE CONTEXT OF PRESERVING ITS REGIONAL FOOTHOLDS AND I
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